

"THE CABIN IN THE CLEARING"

A TRUE STORY OF PIONEER LIFE IN "BEAR STATE"

BY C. E. PLEAS, CHIPLEY, FLA.

It was B. S. Parker, an old friend, and one of Indiana's famous poets, who immortalized in song, "The Cabin in the Clearing," "The Old Rail Fence," "An Autumn Leaf," "The Old Blazed Road," and many other pleasant scenes and customs of pioneer life that are rapidly passing, and but for these pictures in verse would soon be forgotten.

The cabin Parker pictured was surrounded by the wilds of Indiana more than half a century ago. The cabin here pictured still nestles in the foothills of the Ozarks, and the attending features of both are very similar. Only those who have lived it know how to fully appreciate the wilderness, the hardships, the toil and pastimes of such a life.

At the age of twenty I abandoned the many comforts of the nest in the pioneer state to become a settler in the mountains of Arkansas.

I took a square claim adjoining those of my two older brothers and homesteaded it when I became of age. I had nearly double the land surface, on that 160 acres, of any homestead to be found in the state of Florida.

For much of it stood on edge, and things could grow on both sides. I had never seen so much as 160 acres of timber in one body before. Fifty acres made a big woods in our section of Indiana, and being a "mother's boy" I was seldom away from the neighborhood.

I had never seen wild hogs or range cattle and had never seen a wild animal in its haunts, larger than a coon or possum. I had never seen a mountain or forest fires, and had never known what it was to be miles from any human being.

Told of Great Game. I had been told of a bear being killed on our mountain, now it ran a quarter of a mile after being shot, and when skinned there were fourteen bullet holes in the hide. I had been told of great flocks of wild turkeys that frequented "my" land and that as many as seventeen deer had been seen in one herd. That wolves, wildcats and foxes ranged the hills and that a large panther had been killed at "my" springs after carrying off a colt down the river.

Being raised the petted baby of the family, this change was a tremendous leap for one who knew so little of the outside world. I had traded for a gun, a 50-caliber Remington and had the rifle dressed out and fitted with brass shells so I could shoot either shot or ball.

After the longest journey I had ever taken by rail, leaving the home place all wrapped in snow and ice, I landed at Little Rock, amid flowers and leafing trees with still eighty miles before me. Most of which I made in a stage through the woods alone and about.

A Bear Hunt. To describe all incidents of this trip would require more space than is at my command. But as this is to be a bear story and the last few miles of the trip led up to a mountain after night without even so much as a faint trail part of the way and with instructions to keep on the highest ground for a guide, it might be interesting to note how many bear I saw on the way. It is safe to say that I carried my rifle as I fully expected to meet wild animals on the trip. Night overtook me as I entered Clinton, the county seat, at the foot of our mountain, three and a half miles from my destination, and after inquiring the way I was soon climbing and looking for danger.

Many Imaginary Bears. I had not gone far until I saw what appeared to be a black bear standing beside the road ahead as if challenging me. I halted with gun at my shoulder ready to fire if it made an advance, but determined not to fire unless I had to. As it remained still I advanced slowly until I could see

that it was a tall black stump. I was as a loss to understand it, as I had never seen a charred stump in the woods before.

Presently I saw another and this time I thought I could hear it move, and with my gun ready for action I charged bear number two. In fact, I saw many that night, and every noise I heard in the woods was some wolf, panther or other wild beast prowling about, waiting an opportunity to spring upon me. I had heard that the black bear would not attack a man unless wounded or with cubs and as I was quite sure I would not make the first attack that night I



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managed to make my way in safety with only one other thrilling experience.

I heard a noise off to one side, and no mistaking it for a falling limb or bit of bark, for I could hear footsteps in the dry leaves. Then there was another and another and I was aware that I was being surrounded by countless numbers.

Wolves! I thought I, and there I was, no telling how far from any house, in the dark and only three or four loads of ammunition for a possible emergency. Even if I could make every load effective I could not kill enough to satisfy the hunger of the rest of the pack. To spend the night in a tree as chilly as it was was not a very pleasant idea. These and many other similar thoughts passed through my mind in much less time than it takes to tell it. As the timber was thick I resolved to go on, warding them off as long as I could until forced to climb a tree. Anything was preferable to standing there waiting to be eaten and I could put my legs to better use than knocking my knees together. It seems I had been unnoticed up to this time, for with my first movement there was a warning sound and with a thousand snorting grunts a drove of wild hogs went scampering off. As soon as my hat came down and assumed its normal position I proceeded again.

After being out all night, as I thought, I discovered a glimmer in the distance and made for it with a feeling of inexpressible relief. Presently there were many more lights, and I was again in depression for there was no town on our mountain and the nearest one from Clinton was seven miles and I must have taken the wrong trail.

These lights proved to be burned-out log heaps in a clearing, and as I could find no other signs of a habitation I was preparing to build a fire and spend the remainder of the night by it when I heard someone whistling, the most welcome sound I had ever heard. Did you ever hear of "whistling in heaven?" Well, I didn't lose

much time in finding the owner and was soon sitting by a cheery pine knot fire telling my brother of my wonderful adventures.

I had surprised them as completely as I did the pigs, for they were not expecting me for a month. And it was only nine o'clock, but that was the longest three miles and a half I have ever traveled.

Pig Carried Away. One night in May, four years later, I was awakened in my own little "cabin in the clearing" by my wife, who was urging me to "get up quick, there's a pig fast in the fence." You all know how a fast pig can squeal. Well, this was the fastest pig I ever heard. We had two thirty-pounders shut up in a small pen in a fence corner about two rods from the back door, for our next winter's meat. Getting to the back door, I saw what appeared to be the old sow in the yard and the pig trying to get through had gotten fast in a crack, as I thought.

Fearing the old sow would kill it, as they sometimes do, I went out and I hollered and hollered before I could drive her away. She went the pig went too, still squealing. That seemed strange and stranger still, when she got to the corner of the yard she climbed over the fence, pig and all.

About this time I put my thinking cap on and rushed for the gun. This old sow had turned into a bear, and was making off with our little porker. The gun was loaded with bird shot, and while I was fumbling around in the dark for the only ball that was loaded and change loads she was getting away. When I reached the door again she was almost out of sight, about seventy-five yards off, going west along the edge of the bluff. I fired as nearly in that direction as I could, hoping at least to save the pig. At this another bear went lumbering down from the hillside above, joining the other on the bluff. The squealing had now grown less distinct and we supposed the bear had gone down behind the bluff, and as the hollow was six hundred feet deep were soon out of hearing. Next morning, however, we found they had eaten the pig in twenty-five yards of the door and the second bear had joined the first.

We found, also, by tracks in the mud, that there were three signs of bears in the clearing, an old one and two sets of cubs, probably five in all. The old bear's tracks were ten inches long, then there was a size over an inch long and others not over five inches.

Old bear hunters say that whenever or wherever the cubs overtake the old bear with any prey, right there they stop and eat it. This instance seemed to verify the statement. I went to town and told about it, and took an old bear hunter and his dogs back with me, but we could not find the bears, although we did find their "summer quarters," and numerous signs of their having killed hogs, sheep, calves, etc. The clearing was covered some ten or fifteen acres of dogwood flat, and smelled so bad from portions of uneaten carcasses that the dogs could trail no further and after overbearing the place we were glad to get away.

Back for the Other One. That evening I went to a neighbor's a mile away and borrowed a bear trap, arriving home after dark. I set me at the door with the remark that I had better cover the pen up before eating supper for fear the bear came and got the other pig, so I went out to the pen carrying a plank as I went. On looking up the hillside I saw some dark object standing in the path just outside the fence. Our grown hogs, on the range, were in the habit of coming by often, but not at night and for a single hog to be standing there alone and quiet at this time was unusual. Besides, we looked too large for any hog, and if it had been one of our own, it would have come on down when I went out. I went back and told my wife that the bear was out there, and taking the gun and four ball cartridges which I had loaded I went back to the fence to the stile which put me within two panels of the bear. I could not make out sure which was his head end, but decided he would be standing with his head towards me and the fence. I fired a half ounce of lead at it, it whirled off up the hill and I followed, when it stood up as if to come at me. I fired again, and this time it ran about two rods to the right and stopped on all fours. I fired my third load at it broadside, and from the commotion in the brush I thought it was making at me, and only saving one more load and it not in the gun. I broke for the house.

But I had only knocked the bear down, turning it completely around, as it headed off in the opposite direction from that it was standing when I shot. It made a circle of about 75 yards and went crashing off down the bluff about where they ate the pig the night before, breaking through fallen tree tops and making as much noise as a blind horse would running at full speed.

It was panting loudly at every jump and I could hear what sounded like blood in its throat. The ball must have passed through the lungs. This idea was borne out next morning by the fact that in following the trail we could see where the blood had spurted out two to three feet on the far side, showing the ball had passed clear through the body at least. Wherever there was a cupped leaf at these spurts it was full of blood and all who came to see it declared it was impossible for the beast to live.

We followed this trail of blood over half a mile, down, across the hollow, and over and around what is known as "Buck Horn Flat." It had wallowed in the stream down in the bottom and checked the flow of blood so that we lost the trail about the time it reached the "quarters" and as the

trail was getting old we did not go for the dogs this time.

Made Pen Secure. Before night I made the other pig secure by covering the pen with a load of lumber and throwing tin and wire on top to rattle and waken us if another bear should attempt to get in. As about 3 o'clock my brother's dog "Shep" commenced baying. Their house was about 200 yards from ours, on a flat above. "Shep" would first bark in one direction and then another and another and kept up circling about their yard all night. I could hear twice baying on the hillside between our houses. I was awakened several times during the night, and "Shep" was faithfully keeping guard.

Next morning, which was Sunday, we were lying in bed discussing our adventures until way after daylight, and then was up on the hillside baying. "Shep" was trying to get me out before the neighbors came, but I remonstrated, saying that this was Sunday and there were no chores to do and that nobody ever comes of Sunday mornings, and that we hadn't had any sleep scarcely in three nights.

The first rosy sunbeams were streaming in across the bed and wife was renewing her efforts to rouse me but when all at once the other pig in the pen began to snort and run. Wife raised up in bed and said in a loud whisper, "here's a bear now."

"Yes," I said, "that's it sure" and I jumped out, grabbing the gun as I rushed to the door (all in a joke), and on looking out I was more surprised than the bear to see one, as black as a coal and six feet high, standing beside the pen with its forepaws on the fence, sizing up the situation.

My wife, who is as good a rifle shot as I, had made me promise to let her shoot the next bear, if any more came, but that was too good a target to pass a chance at. She would not do it, but got down without gun, shot, and taking rest on the door facing I aimed at its heart and shot it down! With a deep howling roar it flopped around like a chicken with its head off and before my wife could get to the door and flop off down the hill. I called to my wife that "I got him."

We got into our clothes as quickly as possible and taking hand axe, gun, knives, etc., we went out to get some bear steak for breakfast. But there was no steak to be found. There was where he had plunged off the bluff, plowing a furrow fifteen feet long in the loose loam. We started in pursuit, fully expecting to find him dead at the foot of the hill, but it wasn't there. We followed on to the next ridge and to verify the statement that looked like a freshly stuck pig had been dragged along, on down and across the hollow as the others had gone. One would think that if the first bear could not live after such loss of its vital force, the second one would have gotten away. But we followed it for a mile beyond where the other trails were, expecting

at every moment to find it stretched out. But we lost it on a red shale ridge where the blood had ceased to flow in streams and had dried so we could not follow it.

Again Went for Help. I again went for help, reaching town just as folks were getting ready for Sunday school. My news almost broke up the school for that day, for half the men in town went with their guns and dogs to find and kill the bear. Only one dog out of thirty would follow the trail. His owner, a local hunter, followed the trail with him while most of the men and dogs followed behind them. I took the rest of the crowd around the hollow to where I knew the trail came up on top again. We reached the top just as the dog was passing and as he had left the other men far behind and never barked on the trail, we had to run our best to keep in sight of him.

Bayed the Bear. He bayed the bear in the bottom, half a mile beyond where we had lost the trail and as I was the head man, I shouted to encourage him. Off they went up the ravine at a lively chase. Most wild animals run through certain trails or passes and as I had trailed bear through this section before, when snow was on the ground, I knew they would round the head of the hollow and cross over the other mountain known as "Copper Spring Knob."

So, instead of following, I cut across and made straight up the side in hopes of heading them off. When I saw the dog bayed again on the bench above me, I shouted again, not knowing that I had started them before and that if I had kept still I might have gotten a shot.

We never heard them again, and after circling the top of the mountain a couple of times, in hopes of getting their direction, and watching a doe feeding, that seemed to know it was protected by both Sabbath and the close season, I had given up the chase and turned homeward when here came the leader back across the plateau. I tried to coax him to take the trail again. I hissed and I scolded and he whistled and scolded in vain. He paid no more attention to me than if he had been both blind and deaf. Presently here came another dog and another, and still more, and Shep in the rear, all apparently tired out.

I found the crowd waiting on my return to the den. There were evidences that all the bears had been stopping there and we knew that both our dogs had been. The first bear had rubbed the blood off its wound on the side of a sapling as he came down the mountain and we had trailed the other wounded one there.

Bordering along the bluff the den was under a dense thicket of tall wetery stemmed weeds and through this were four well defined, newly made trails going in different directions. We decided that the dogs had engaged and taken the trail of one of the wild bears while the others plunged through this thicket and were out of sight.

This ended our bear hunt for that day except that Shep and one of the town curs had a fight, in which we all took a turn in trying to separate them and were unsuccessful until one of the crowd took Shep by the collar and threw both dogs off the bluff and they landed far enough apart to forget about it before they met again. We were never bothered by bear again, but a neighbor, six miles away, had a calf stolen one morning and on turning the old cow out she attacked Mr. Bruin and made him drop it.

CHILDE ROLAND

H. C. Edgar, Instructor Browning Club

The great disparity between the many interpretations offered for this poem would seem to indicate that it does not furnish enough data to form an adequate basis for any very definite specific interpretation. It is by no means unlikely that the poem is merely a mystical allegory, incapable of a precise translation into literal terms; but was written only to shadow forth certain emotions, which, by their very nature, are inexpressible.

We ought then to approach this poem without any preconceived interpretations in mind. After a first reading we gather these general facts:

(1) Roland thought the Cripple lied when he directed his search on to the plain which held the tower. Therefore Roland was not seeking the tower (stanzas 1, 2 and 3). (2) To seek the tower was synonymous with failure, in the eyes of the world, and in some sense at least in the eyes of Roland; (stanza 7). (3) Yet even to find the tower required a certain sort of fitness; (stanza 7). (4) He turns towards the tower in despair, anxious to make an end; (stanza 3). (5) Everybody knew the tower was in the plain; was not so difficult to find, though perhaps it required courage to seek it; (stanza 3). (6) The two hills on the right, the tall scalped mountain on the left, are suddenly recognized by Roland, presumably because he has heard of what they look like, rather than because he has seen them before; (stanza 30). (7) He says he has spent his life in training for this sight. Then in the next stanza he says—"What in the midst lay but the tower itself?" This does not necessarily imply that the tower was part of the sight his life had been spent in training for; (stanzas 30 and 31). (8) Whatever he sought, he calls his search a "quest" (stanza 7); and speaks elsewhere of a man being knighted; (stanza 17). So it seems that his quest should be taken in the good sense—as a quest for what he at least considered a worthy object. He could not then have been seeking for the tower. When he says his life had been spent in training for the sight, may he not mean, then, that, while on his quest, he had constantly kept in mind what the tower and its vicinity were reported to look like, so that he might avoid it, and not seek failure? (9) The following expressions, used in connection with the tower, indicate its character: "epitaph"

(stanza 2); "some end" (stanza 3); "failure" (stanza 7); "round, squat, blind as the fool's head, built of brownstone, without a counterpart in the whole world; like a hidden reef to a sailor" (stanza 31); "lost, lost" (stanza 32); "end of the creature" (stanza 33); "last of me" (stanza 34). (10) The phrase, "clicking of the trap" in stanza 29, and all of stanza 32, indicates that not only the tower but the mountains around it partook of its fatal character. Therefore, he was not seeking for the tower; but for something totally different, we are not told what.

From these preliminary points we may conclude—that Roland had long been on a quest for a worthy object unmentioned; that, remaining unsuccessful, he despaired, and, in his despair, deliberately let himself be prevailed upon, by a man he knew was a liar, to turn towards the tower; that this tower represents a physical, mental or moral catastrophe; but that he displays a dauntless courage in the face of it.

Having gained this basis to work upon, we may now proceed to test various interpretations upon it. What catastrophe does the tower represent? (a) Is it death? But Roland compares it to death; and Browning would not compare the symbol to the thing it symbolized.

(b) Is it Atheism or religious doubt? Not because Roland's failure in his quest leads him in despair deliberately to seek it. The only quest which leads to religious doubt is the quest for a knowledge of things not given to man to understand; and this quest leads directly towards its final term, unbelief. But Roland leaves the road, and turns in another direction when he commences to seek the tower; and he is fully conscious of the precise moment when he abandons his quest.

(c) Is the tower immortality? No! because the approaches to vice are not hideous, but attractive; and his question should be fit to see the tower, fit to fall as his companions had—would be without meaning.

(d) The tower to my mind represents failure—in its widest and vaguest sense—worldly failure; and Roland's progress through the plain towards the tower represents not the abrupt defeat of a worthy ambition, but the slow, miserable, increasing

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Year.	Dividend Additions.
1889.....	\$ 165 03
1890.....	181 54
1891.....	196 70
1892.....	222 47
1893.....	242 81
1894.....	264 40
1895.....	302 99
1896.....	387 06
1897.....	403 03
1898.....	418 89
1899.....	434 48
1900.....	449 53
1901.....	582 98
1902.....	571 01
1903.....	554 96
1904.....	561 93
1905.....	592 98
1906.....	606 00
1907.....	620 00
1908.....	640 00

Total Dividend Additions to date\$8,458 79

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realization of failure—represents despair.

Let us now apply the details of the narrative.

Roland quits his noble striving in passive despair. He has striven for some ideal so high as to be impossible and the Cripple is the cynical friend who mocks him for his visionary enthusiasm, confronts him with the sense of his failure, and thus introduces him into a region of despair. Roland still believes his ideal noble, but loses the ambition to strive for it longer. Consequently, he is at once cast, by a sudden transition, on the desert of despair—a waste barren of all that makes life worth living. The traces of brutes indicate that such a low, sordid, unhoping life is below the level of man. The horse is the symbol of such creatures as inhabit there—stupid, and no longer useful to themselves or others. He is now rendered the consolation of the dear memories of his youth's golden dreams. For despair is essentially a mental condition; and so Browning makes the disgraced Cuthbert and the traitor Gilles obtrude upon Roland's recollection. At the river, Roland reaches the stage where his own sufferings make him spiteful against others. The symbols now begin to represent inward struggles of growing violence—the mad struggle to get away from himself, as a mad struggle to escape from a poisoned tank; the harrow of his mental torture; then nature, like his own thoughts, growing into all manner of hideousness, and

then the great black bird of Satan, which suggests to him an escape from his agony in a life of reckless sin and blasphemy. Suddenly the full realization of his despair rushes upon him, imprisoning him with insurmountable mountains; and he sees in the midst what but the very tower of failure itself, closed to every ray of hope, as a fool's heart is always closed to reason, and with no counterpart in all the catalogue of sufferings. He remembers the worldly failure of all his old comrades; and yet at this moment when despair is at its very height, he summons up, from hidden depths of character, the fighting spirit of undaunted defiance, and achieves a moral victory.

Two Bits.

Once there was a twenty-five cent piece who thought he was the whole thing.

"Foolish one," said a subsidiary coin who occupied the next compartment in the till, "you are not the whole thing by any means. You are but a quarter of the whole."

"Yes, but being a quarter, am I not complete in and to myself? Am I not a unit, one and indivisible, an ego, an entity?"

"No," broke in a grumpy, crumpled greenback with the emphasis with which old age customarily punctuates its remarks, "you are not a unit. You are a dual personality; hence the appellation, 'two bits.'"

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